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SUBJECT: CODEL SPECTER IN SOUTH INDIA: COMMUNISTS, COMPUTERS AND CULTURE

1. (U) Summary: During a December 17-22 visit to the south Indian states of Kerala and Karnataka, Senator Arlen Specter (R-Pennsylvania) viewed first-hand India's high-tech and business boom, met with judicial officials and journalists, and experienced traditional culture and politics, the latter in a lively meeting with Kerala's communist Chief Minister. Meeting topics included the war in Iraq, the U.S.-India civil nuclear accord, the impact of out-sourcing on U.S. jobs, and judicial activism and reform. The south India destinations for Senator Specter and his small delegation were Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram, the commercial and political capitals of Kerala, and Bangalore, the main city of neighboring Karnataka. End summary.

Chief Minister Revisits the Cold War

2. (SBU) On December 21 in Thiruvananthapuram (which is also still known by its former name, Trivandrum), the capital of Kerala, Senator Specter, joined by Chennai Principal Officer Hopper, met with Chief Minister V.S. Achuthanandan (Communist Party of India-Marxist), the state's highest elected official. Senator Specter asked if the Chief Minister carries out Marxist doctrine in governing Kerala. Achuthanandan said that in Kerala, like in West Bengal and Tripura, the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) rules in coalition with other leftist, like-minded, but not necessarily Marxist parties. He nevertheless is guided by the CPI-M election manifesto prepared for the early 2006 state election, and he characterized his government's policies as "left democratic." Achuthanandan said that this means abolishing a "feudal system" of land ownership in which some wealthy people owned 50,000 acres of land they did not use while poor farmers had to make do with a tenth of one acre. He said his government's land reform program operates under the principles of "land to the tiller" and debt forgiveness for poor farmers. Those willing to work on government-owned land pay nominal rent for 12 years and then receive full ownership. Achuthanandan said that one million farmers have now received land under this program and hundreds of thousands have been freed from bonded labor. He added that education and health care were also priorities for his government. He claimed that every child has access to 12 years of free education and that 50 percent of the seats in universities are reserved for students from socially and economically disadvantaged segments of society. He said health care is universal and free and is administered at the village level.

3. (SBU) Senator Specter also asked about the application of Marxist theory in the wider world where so many communist regimes have been discredited and have fallen. Achuthanandan responded that "the Soviet Union had been a huge success for 75 years but collapsed in the end because of wrong practices and the actions of the CIA." He said that even Russian President Putin, though not a communist, "is engaged in a struggle against the United States." Achuthanandan claimed that "despite U.S. efforts to encourage counter-revolutionaries" in China during the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 and "despite 180 attempts by the CIA to kill Castro

in Cuba," communism is flourishing in those countries as well as in North Korea and Vietnam.

¶4. (SBU) Achuthanandan then asked a number of rhetorical questions: "How many democratically elected leaders have been assassinated by the U.S. government?" "How can the United States justify attacking Iraq?" "Why does the U.S. not free Saddam Hussein after a farcical trial?" Achuthanandan also claimed, "Saddam in his entire life used a fraction of the weapons of mass destruction that the U.S. used in Vietnam." Senator Specter pointed out that Saddam had used WMD against Iranians and Iraqis alike, that U.S. intelligence, although later proved wrong, pointed to continuing stockpiles of WMD, and that Saddam had been proved in Iraqi courts to have tortured and murdered his own people and must now face Iraqi justice. Senator Specter added that a precipitous withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq would result in even more killing. The sometimes contentious discussion between the Senator and Chief Minister ended with the Chief Minister's backhanded comment: "We don't like Bush, but we are with the American people."

Technology and Culture in Thiruvananthapuram

¶5. (U) Senator Specter visited U.S. Technologies, a California-based information technology corporation with a large software development and customer support facility in Thiruvananthapuram's "Techno-Park."

U.S. Technologies made a presentation highlighting the core values and features of the company, including its information technology consulting and development services to industry verticals such as healthcare, retail financial services, and manufacturing utilities and logistics. When the U.S. Technologies briefer proudly pointed out that Independence Healthcare in Philadelphia is one of the many U.S. companies supported from the Kerala office, Senator Specter asked about the number and location of employees who were doing

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that work before U.S. Technologies was engaged.

¶6. (U) The head of the Travancore royal family, who were the pre-Indian independence rulers of the area, Marthanda Varma Maharaja, along with his sister Lakshmi Bai and their immediate family members, received Senator Specter at the Kowdiar Palace and discussed the history and culture of Kerala. The erudition of the Kerala royal family was in rich display, as much as the religious and cultural heritage of the state, deeply impressing Senator Specter and the accompanying visitors. Senator Specter also visited the art gallery housing many of the painting of Raja Ravi Varma, a member of the royal family who was one of India's leading artists in oils.

Kochi: Press, Judges and Business People

¶7. (U) Earlier, in Kochi (which is also still known by its former name, Cochin), the economic and business hub of Kerala, Senator Specter met with the editorial board of the Malayala Manorama, the state's leading daily newspaper, including director and managing editor Philip Mathew. The questions put to Senator Specter focused on U.S.-Indian relations and India's standing in the world. Senator Specter said that because of India's position as the world's largest democracy and as a growing economic power, the country should be considered for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. He said that the U.S. should forge closer trade relations with India, and he saw cooperation in the area of nuclear energy as a boon to both nations. Senator Specter said that the U.S. government has not effectively communicated its policies to the world's Muslims, many of whom wrongly believe that the U.S. is against Islam.

¶8. (U) Another highlight of Senator Specter's Kochi visit was a meeting with Chief Justice V.K. Bali and four senior judges of the Kerala High Court. The judicial appointment system in India and the relations between the Indian judicial and legislative branches of government formed a good part of the discussions. "Do you legislate?" Senator Specter asked the judges, touching off discussions on the theme of judicial activism for which the Kerala High Court is especially reputed. "We fill the gaps (in the laws

and the Constitution)," the judges replied, pointing to the powers vested in them to issue orders and writs for ensuring the fundamental rights of the citizens guaranteed in the Indian Constitution.

¶9. (U) Senator Specter had lively discussions with Kochi businessmen at two events -- a dinner hosted by the Kerala Indo-American Chamber of Commerce and a lunch hosted by the Cochin Chamber of Commerce. At both events, Senator Specter acknowledged the growing importance of India on the world stage and the fair claim for a greater role for India at the United Nations. He conceded that the U.S. involvement in Iraq was based on inaccurate intelligence but pointed out that now that the U.S. is there, it cannot withdraw precipitously, leaving the country in chaos.

¶10. (U) Senator Specter toured the AD 1568 Mattancherry Synagogue guided by Samuel Hallegua, the leader of the small Jewish community in Kochi. He saw with great interest the scrolls of Jewish scriptures and the historic copper plates in which the privileges granted by the erstwhile Kochi kings to the Kerala Jewish community are recorded. The delegation also visited the "backwaters" area of Kerala, near Kochi, which is growing as a destination for international and domestic tourism, an important industry for Kerala's economy.

Bangalore: High-Tech City

¶11. (U) On December 20 in Bangalore, the capital of the state of Karnataka and the center of India's information technology industry, a visit to IBM India's facility provided an opportunity for Senator Specter to witness some of the company's worldwide operations directed from the Global Operations Center. Senator Specter asked IBM India executives about the number of jobs that have been moved from the U.S. to India, to which the executives replied that there has been no migration of jobs to India.

¶12. (U) A visit to General Electric's John F. Welch Technology Center (GE-JWTC) brought Senator Specter up close to some of the next generation technologies that the company plans to bring to the market. The qualifications of the scientists employed and the wages paid to them were the focus of the Senator's discussions with scientists present during his visit. GE-JWTC's next generation imaging systems with medical applications caught the Senator's interest as it enabled him to virtually enter the human brain.

¶13. (U) During a lunch meeting with Justice Mallimath, chairman of India's Judicial Review Committee, Senator Specter asked about the current state of the Indian criminal justice system and the measures

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taken to speed up the judicial process, a major aim of the Committee. Justice Mallimath outlined some of the recommendations made by his Committee and the government's effort to implement one of the key recommendations, a witness protection program.

¶14. (U) For his visit Senator Specter was accompanied by Mrs. Joan Specter, staffer Scott Boos, military escorts and Consulate General Chennai staff. This message was not cleared by the delegation.
HOPPER